

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council

December 9, 2003

**Marathon Government Center and
The Turtle Hospital**

FINAL MINUTES

Members Present:

Wayne Blevins	Nancy Klingener
Jack Curlett	Duncan Mathewson
Fran Decker	Martin Moe
Greg DiDomenico	Ken Nedimyer
Todd Firm	George Neugent
Richard Grathwohl	Bruce Popham
Debra Harrison	Anita Schwessinger
David Hawtof	Deborah Shaw
Don Kincaid	Brad Simonds
Mark Klingbeil	

Alternates Present:

Sheila Mullins
Jody Thomas

Call to Order

Chair Neugent called the meeting to order at 9:12 a.m.

Approval of Minutes and Adoption of Agenda

The Minutes of the October 21, 2003 meeting were approved as presented and the Agenda was modified to include an item in Unfinished Business. The modified Agenda was adopted.

Sanctuary Superintendent's Report – Billy Causey (FKNMS)

Mr. Causey gave the attached report. He then gave a PowerPoint presentation on a recent visit he made to China as part of a Department of Commerce delegation. He noted that an area of mutual concern between south China and south Florida is harmful algal blooms and that there is scientific collaboration between the two regions, although Chinese officials directly ascribe their occurrences to agricultural run-off. He concluded by saying that there was much that each country could learn from the other in many areas, including technological information from the United States and management concepts from China. He observed that the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary (FKNMS) has a sister sanctuary in southern China, the Sania Coral Reef Marine Reserve, and exchanges between the two are ongoing, with FKNMS providing assistance with mooring buoys and enforcement programs.

Public Comment

Ms. Laura Engleby, South East Stranding Coordinator for National Marine Fisheries, said that the pilot whale debriefing took place in November. She noted that over 50 people participated from the State of Florida, FKNMS, law enforcement all the rescue groups and large numbers of volunteers and interested constituents. The lessons learned from the stranding event are the need for improved communications and record keeping, as well as the need to develop protocols. Discussion followed concerning the need to follow up on what was shared at the meeting. It was noted that Dr. Jim Bohnsack is the new Division Chief at NOAA Southeast Fisheries Science Center in Miami.

Sanctuary Superintendent's Report (contd.) – Billy Causey

Mr. Causey said that Biscayne National Park (BISC) is going to use a Sanctuary Advisory Council Working Group comprised of SAC members, Sanctuary staff, knowledgeable stakeholders, BISC staff and Fish & Wildlife staff to come up with recommendations for the BISC Fisheries Management Plan, which is part of the BISC General Management Plan. There is likely to be consideration of No Take Areas.

Florida Department of Environmental Protection Agency Report – Anne McCarthy (Lower Region Manager)

Ms. McCarthy gave a status report on the Piney Point phosphate plant clean-up project. Discussion followed concerning funding, prevention of similar occurrences and monitoring. She gave a status report on the Navy dredging project in Key West. She mentioned that State lands held by FDEP and the Coastal and Aquatic Managed Areas will now be managed by State Parks. She gave a status report on the Damage Assessment and Restoration Program. Discussion concerned a concrete dumping incident on a patch reef off Marathon.

Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission Report – John Hunt (FMRI)

Mr. Hunt gave a status report on the Strategic Science Plan of the Florida Bay Program Management Committee. He mentioned that FMRI will be involved in monitoring the new No Take Area within Buck Island Reef National Park, which is managed by the National Park Service in St. Croix. He discussed endangered species issues considered by FWC commissioners at their November meeting. He also reviewed decisions made by the commissioners regarding lobsters, specifically allocation and enforcement issues. Discussion concerned the suspension of the trap reduction program for three years.

Sanctuary Enforcement Report – Officer Andy Cox (FWC)

Officer Cox said that the newly refurbished Point Monroe will shortly be back in full service. He said that law enforcement officers do not consider “casitas” to be habitat but to be illegal traps. Discussion concerned Major Long’s retirement and the appointment of Major Skip Russo to his position covering Monroe, Collier and Dade Counties. Further discussion concerned design of lobster traps.

Unfinished Business

Wayne Blevins reviewed the perceived status of the recommendations made by the Sanctuary Advisory Council to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in

January, 2002 regarding marine mammal strandings in the Florida Keys. He moved that the original letter that was sent to the National Marine Fisheries Service be accompanied by a short letter from Billy Causey asking them to respond within 30 days of the date of the letter, to be done by the end of the week, regarding what they have or have not done and what they intend to do with the four points mentioned in that letter. The motion was seconded by Todd Firm. Discussion concerned the contents of the letter and process for forwarding recommendations. Further discussion concerned Letters of Agreement issued by NMFS to stranding organizations and the location and inventory of suitable sites for rehabilitation of stranded marine mammals. Mr. Blevins withdrew his motion.

Florida Area Coastal Environmental (FACE) Initiative – Whit Van Cott (Utility Director, City of Hollywood)

Mr. Van Cott gave the attached PowerPoint presentation on the current status of scientific knowledge related to coastal zone ecosystems. He emphasized the need for multi-decadal data bases on coastal parameters and listed the multi-agency representatives on the FACE Steering Committee. He outlined a proposal in the EPA Appropriations Bill for a federal funding program of \$50-70 million over the coming decade to collect data that will enable utility managers to make science-based decisions. Discussion concerned cost-benefit analyses and the monitoring programs and initiatives already in existence in South Florida. Dr. John Proni of the Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory (AOML) and Chair of the Steering Committee observed that the program is going to give people an opportunity to influence long-term decisions for water, waste water and energy. Discussion concerned the composition of the Technical Advisory Group.

Spillover of Lobsters from the Western Sambo Ecological Reserve – Dr. Rod Bertelsen (FMRI)

Dr. Bertelsen gave the attached PowerPoint presentation on a pilot study conducted over the summer and showed video of antennae-tagged lobster movements in and out of the Reserve. The pilot study is the precursor to a larger study funded by an EPA Special Studies grant which will investigate the relationships between benthic habitat and lobster movements through time using GIS mapping and sonic tagging. Of particular interest are the movements of reproductive females between the reef and patch reef environments. Discussion concerned the value of the study in determining the minimum effective size of marine preserves and the importance of locating them in habitats that fulfill biological requirements for particular species. Further discussion concerned the difference between recruitment of animals into the fishery and the production of eggs. The importance of the Pourtales Gyre as a retentive mechanism for larvae in the Florida Keys was discussed.

Reproductive Failure of Queen Conch in the FKNMS: What is the role of endocrine disruptors – Bob Glazer (FMRI)

Mr. Glazer gave the attached PowerPoint presentation on a proposed EPA Special Studies/FMRI project to investigate which chemicals in the environment are negatively impacting reproductive ability of Queen Conch in nearshore waters. There are both anthropogenic and natural sources for estrogen mimics and the study will quantitatively determine what the impact of these chemicals is on reproductive development. There

will be a comparison of nearshore and offshore animals and controlled exposures of animals to suspected chemicals. Discussion concerned anecdotal evidence for historic populations of conch breeding in nearshore waters and the recent eutrophication of nearshore waters. Mr. Glazer added that a recent pilot study investigating the effects of mosquito control pesticides showed that there are negative impacts on the development of larval conch.

Further Unfinished Business

Upon receipt of clarifying information, Chair Neugent and Mr. Blevins agreed that Chair Neugent and Mr. Causey will draft a letter to the National Marine Fisheries Service requesting a status report on the identification of rehabilitation facilities in Monroe County.

Identifying Sources and Sinks of Larvae in the Florida Keys using Drift Vials – Gabriel Delgado (FMRI)

Mr. Delgado gave the attached PowerPoint presentation on a proposed study to investigate the sources and sinks of Queen Conch larvae in the Florida Keys, Gulf of Mexico and Florida Straits. Particularly important from a management perspective in restoring conch populations is determining whether larvae produced in the Florida Keys are retained locally within the system. He described the design of the experiment which is carefully targeted to minimize any impact on turtles. Detailed discussion concerned turtle breeding season, discrete turtle feeding and breeding grounds, design of the vials, the absence of glass in FWC turtle necropsies and the minute likelihood of even one turtle dying as a result of ingesting a glass vial. After intense questioning and deliberation, the Council concluded that the scientific merits of the study far outweighed any perceived negative impacts on turtle populations.

Dr. Hawtof moved that the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council recommends to Sanctuary managers that the drift vial research project to ascertain the dispersal of Queen Conch larvae in the Pourtales Gyre in the summer months proposed by Bob Glazer and Gabriel Delgado of FMRI be permitted, and that the research is supported by the Sanctuary Advisory Council. The motion was seconded by Dr. Shaw and passed unanimously.

Visit to The Turtle Hospital, Marathon.

Council members, Sanctuary staff and visitors went to The Turtle Hospital, Marathon, where Richie Moretti, his staff and volunteers gave a presentation on the past year's achievements at the Hospital and an overview of the possible causes and prevalence of the papilloma virus in sea turtles. They gave the visitors a guided tour of the tanks, laboratory and operating theater concluding in the Reception and Education Center at The Hidden Harbor Motel. Amongst the animals recuperating at the Hospital were pre- and post-operative individuals suffering from the papilloma virus, animals injured in boating accidents, animals injured due to gear entanglement and one female loggerhead who was attacked by feral dogs while laying eggs on St. Croix. A recurring problem amongst turtles is starvation due to intestinal impactions caused by eating selected marine debris,

particularly plastics. This was one of the last private guided tours, as the Hospital will soon be opening to the public.

National Marine Sanctuaries Act Re-Authorization – June Cradick (FKNMS)

Ms. Cradick facilitated a discussion amongst Council members concerning the attached amendments recommended by the Sanctuaries Act Re-Authorization Working Group. The Council reviewed all the recommendations.

Dr. Hawtof moved that the Council accept the recommendations of the Working Group. Ken Nedimyer seconded the Motion. Discussion followed concerning the meaning of the terms “ecosystem management”, “improved ocean governance” and “reasonable”.

It was considered appropriate that the Management Plan be reviewed not less than every five years and not more than every ten years.

The inclusion of liability coverage for Sanctuary volunteers was considered to be on the Top Five priority list.

It was agreed to promote and participate in the implementation of ocean observing systems.

Special Use Permits

Ms. Cradick facilitated a discussion amongst Council members concerning the establishment of Special Use Permits to manage non-traditional activities that are potentially damaging to resources in the Sanctuary, with specific reference to boat salvage operators, marine mammal watching tours and power boat races in the back country, as requested by local community groups. Discussion concerned the authority to establish such permits, as described in Section 310 of The National Marine Sanctuaries Act. Concerns were raised that the authority to issue such permits at some future date could be extended to all consumptive activities within the Sanctuary.

After this issue was separated from all other recommendations made by the Working Group to the Advisory Council, Dr. Hawtof’s motion passed by a majority with one No vote.

Dr. Shaw moved that the Sanctuary Advisory Council approve the recommendations of the Working Group on re-authorization and request that Sanctuary staff, as requested by members of the public, have the authority to issue Special Use Permits to regulate/permit non-traditional activities that are potentially damaging to Sanctuary resources, like but not limited to, boat salvage operators, marine mammal watching tours and power boat races in the back country. The Motion was seconded by Ms. Thomas. Discussion concerned the importance of allowing the Sanctuary Advisory Council to review and approve any language drafted in response to this request prior to submitting it to NOAA Headquarters. It was clarified that any regulatory changes would be subject to public review, and that these three issues are the only ones for which the issuance of a Special

Use Permit has been problematic since 1997. Upon roll call vote, the motion was passed by a two-thirds majority.

Other Business

Ms. Thomas requested that the Sanctuary organize a workshop with dedicated panels on the subject of water quality issues in the Florida Keys.

Announcements

Mr. DiDomenico announced that this is his last meeting with the Advisory Council as he is taking up a position in New Jersey. Tony Iarocci will replace him on the Council.

Adjourned 5:05 p.m.

Submitted respectfully by

Fiona Wilmot